



**Home Sweet Home: Assessing the Weight  
and the Effectiveness of National Parties'  
Interference on MEPs' everyday Activity**

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## Abstract<sup>1</sup>

The paper aims at *ex post* assessing the weight and the effectiveness of domestic parties' role in shaping and controlling the voting behaviour of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). The empirical analysis addresses the turnover between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> EP legislatures and focuses on the three major European political families. Provided that, so far, the re-election of MEPs is still an eminently national business, this study estimates national parties' attitudes towards behaving according to a 'sanction-benefit' mindset, thereby evaluating how MEPs' careers in the aftermath of the 2004 elections have been influenced by their compliance to national party's line.

The analysis shows that seven out of the twelve delegations taken into consideration are marked by an evident sanctionary nature. In these delegations, national loyalty emerges as a key factor for a successful future political career both at home and at EP level. Accordingly, it has been found that in the sanctionary cases a recurrent pattern emerges: the former MEPs promoted as national or local representatives emerge as the most nationally-loyal, followed by the re-elected MEPs; whereas the former MEPs retired or excluded from political life emerge as those keener to defect during their past European mandate. When it comes to the five delegations that do not fit the sanctionary model, the recognition of common traits or comparable behavioural patterns proves to be extremely difficult. Even if identifying the reasons for differences among the delegations goes beyond the scope of this paper, the analysis demonstrates that, given the low statistical relevance in the five cases, it is possible to rule out the possibility of opposite behavioural patterns in the non-sanctionist delegations.

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# Home Sweet Home: Assessing the Weight and the Effectiveness of National Parties' Interference on MEPs' everyday Activity

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## Introduction

In a letter to its national leadership, a senior Conservative Party MEP, Sir Robert Atkins, described the relation between its delegation and the EPP-ED parliamentary group in these terms: *'we have complete freedom to speak on any issue we wish, whether or not contrary to the EPP position, to vote in any way we wish and to act in any way we wish. Our sole guide is the Conservative Manifesto on which we were elected and our Leadership decides absolutely and without external pressures of any sort how Tory MEPs will operate. Of course, on many issues, we are of like mind with the EPP but in the last session, we took a different view on about 30% of the votes. There is no compunction to vote with the EPP on issues with which we differ from them'*. Atkins then added that *'the advantages of this EP arrangement far outweigh the disadvantages. As 27 MEPs sitting alone, we would be unlikely to have any real influence in debate and discussions and would be in unsullied but futile isolation'*<sup>2</sup>. Notwithstanding the well-known particular position of the conservative delegation at EP level<sup>3</sup>, this short excerpt seems to provide a helpful starting point for a more attentive analysis of the voting dynamics in the European Parliament.

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.sir-robertatkins.org/Press\\_Releases/epp-ed\\_conservative\\_facts.htm/](http://www.sir-robertatkins.org/Press_Releases/epp-ed_conservative_facts.htm/)

<sup>3</sup> The European Democrats (ED), which consist of the British and Czech conservatives (since 2004), secured a special *status* as allied members of EPP-ED parliamentary group, thereby safeguarding their peculiarities and the apartness. The cooperation with the mainstream EPP strictly covers only the activities at EP level, whereas outside the parliament no formal link has been developed between the EPP transnational party federation (TPF) and the conservatives. On the other hand their *liberté de manoeuvre* is explicitly recognized in the article 2.2 of the Rules of Procedure of the Group of the European People's Party and European Democrats in the European Parliament states that "the members under this article [the EDs] have the right to promote and develop their distinct views on constitutional and institutional issues in relation to the future of Europe" [[http://www.epp-ed.org/group/docs/rules-procedure2004\\_en.doc](http://www.epp-ed.org/group/docs/rules-procedure2004_en.doc)]. On the relationship between Conservatives and the European People's Party see Lynch and Whitaker (2007) and Maurer et al. (2008).

From Sir Atkins' words two points appear to be clear. *First*, in his view, the European Parliamentary group (EPG) represents a functional structure aimed at promoting national party's political priorities on a larger and wider basis in cooperation with other likeminded and ideologically-compatible national partners. *Second*, if there is no agreement between the national party delegation (NPD) and the European group on a specific 'nationally-salient' policy issue, the MEPs are supposed to follow their domestic leadership's recommendations (if any), that is, to vote nationally. But, what happens if some of them do not? Or, if there are no recommendations from home? Provided that the national parties are, so far, the only actors which can substantially affect MEPs' electoral chances, this paper will look at the developments of Europarliamentarians' post-2004 career within and outside the EP as a function of their voting behaviour in the EP. More precisely, It assesses the existence (and the strength) of a direct relationship between their degree of national loyalty and their success in obtaining a seat both in Brussels and at home as national or regional representatives, thereby testing domestic leadership's capacity and willingness to behave according to a retrospective sanctionary reasoning. What degree of control can the domestic leadership exert on its MEPs? Moreover, does it *actually* care? Starting from these challenging and not yet fully answered questions, this paper addresses the issue of national parties' interference on MEPs' voting activity from an original perspective. It takes into consideration 12 major national party delegations in the 5<sup>th</sup> EP (consisting of 289 MEPs, more than 35% of the total). All the NPDs included in the sample belong to one of the three major political families represented in the European Parliament. Both the significant size of the sample analysed and its composition seem to guarantee a fairly high degree of analytical reliability for the study and appear to provide a solid basis for the generalizability of its results and inferences.

The paper proceeds as follows: first, it analyses the recent literature on EP internal voting dynamics and MEPs' hierarchy of preferences, thereby developing a helpful theoretical platform for my successive analytical steps (section 2). It will then move on to propose a consistent set of propositions designed to assess national delegations' 'sanction-benefit' attitude (section 3). After describing the nature of the data and discussing the process of case selection and sample definition (section 4), it will define the methods of analysis employed to put my set of hypotheses to test (section 5). Afterwards, the paper will

discuss the results and comment the relevance of the findings in the light of the theoretical assumptions (section 6). In the final section it looks at the broader implications of the findings and develops some general conclusions which provide room for further analysis on the topic.

### **Key insights from the literature**

In the last two decades, there has been growing interest in the study of the European Parliament, reflected in the greater number of books, journal articles, and dissertations devoted to such topics. The main reason behind this phenomenon appears to be the increasing institutional relevance of the EU assembly. At each step of the integrative path, the role of the European legislators has been made stronger both in its scope and effectiveness. Since the Single European Act (SEA) came into force, the competences under the scrutiny of the European Parliament (EP) and its effective part in EC/EU policy-shaping process have dramatically grown. To put it simply, the EP is by far the only international parliamentary arena provided with an effective set of working legislative tools comparable to those conferred to the national legislatures. In addition, it towers as the only directly elected institution at EU level.

Consistent with the goals of this paper and its analytical focus, the study addresses several specific aspects of the EP internal dynamics concerning the voting behaviour of the Europarliamentarians and the role played by the national party delegations in shaping their voting preferences vis-à-vis the European parliamentary groups. Particular attention will be devoted to the role played by the national parties in the candidate selection process (MEPs' careers inside and outside the EP) and to the understanding of its concrete impact on MEPs' everyday legislative activity.

### **The nature of MEPs' dual-parliamentary role**

Recently, a growing number of scholars looked at MEPs' parliamentary conduct through the interpretative lens provided by the Principal-Agent (PA) model, thereby interpreting MEPs' voting behaviour as function of swinging and 'divided loyalties' marked by an unstable *equilibrium* between 'nationally-oriented' and 'EU-oriented' pressures (Faas, 2003; Hix, 2002; Mair, 2006; Noury, 2002; Scully, 2001). According to the tenets of the

PA model, the principal (P) delegates a share of power to the agent (A) in order to accomplish a task on behalf of him. In other words, principals ‘demand’ certain tasks, which agents ‘supply’. A set of rewards and sanctions are assumed to be functionally distributed by the principal in order to drive agent’s choices and to gain his loyalty. If we look at the EP environment and at its internal dynamics, two distinct principals have been identified which strive to influence MEPs’ voting choices: the national party delegation and the parliamentary leadership of the European party group. Provided the objectives of this paper, my attention will be primarily referred to the effectiveness of the control exerted by the ‘national principal’ (NPDs). Adopting a different perspective, we can understand the MEPs’ “dual-parliamentary role” (Messmer, 2003: 205) in terms of representation of different (and sometimes incompatible) interests which oscillate between a *national-partisan* pole and a *European-partisan* pole. Accordingly, in a recent article based on the results of a MEP survey, Scully and Farrell (2003: 271) conclude that “MEPs [...] generally view themselves as ‘agents’ with important responsibilities to represent multiple ‘principals’”.

The contributions which embrace the PA interpretative framework generally understand MEPs’ voting defections as a consequence of the varying balance of national and European parliamentary incentives. Hix (1999) and Faas (2003) identify three main interests which drive MEPs’ voting choices at parliamentary level: re-election, offices, and policies. The mainstream literature which adopts this analytical perspective sees the former as by and large secured by the national party, whereas policies and offices are pursued within the framework of the parliamentary group<sup>4</sup>. Given the absence of Europe-

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<sup>4</sup> This picture represents a simplification of the ‘dual-parliamentary’ logic and tells us only part of the story. In fact, this phenomenon appears less straightforward and much more complicated as the identification of the national and parliamentary dimensions is extremely blurred. When we look at the national side, the literature identifies four exogenous factors which significantly affect the credibility of national parties’ de-selection treat and shape the relationship between parties and representatives: the electoral system, the district magnitude, the candidate-selection rules, and the institutional and territorial structure of the state (federal vs. unitary and presidential vs. parliamentary systems) (Hix, 2004). The combination of these four factors determines the level of party leadership involvement in the MEPs’ parliamentary life. Here, a *continuum* exists that ranges from party-centred systems to candidate-centred systems in which the “incentive to cultivate a personal vote” and the degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the ‘party at home’ varies (Carey and Shugart, 1995: 417).

wide electoral tides and the still embryonic nature of the *Europarties*<sup>5</sup>, the lists of those who stand for the elections and their position in the lists are decided at home without almost any interference from the European group. Accordingly, Hix (2004: 201) maintains that the parliamentary parties in the European Parliament have much in common with the parties in the U.S. Congress as “the European party groups control the committee assignments and the agenda inside the parliament, yet have few powers, such as selecting candidates for parliamentary elections or controlling election campaigns”. In line with this perspective, the European Parliament can be seen as “a hypothetical U.S. Congress with different electoral institutions in each U.S. state” (Hix, 2004: 201).

For the sake of clarity, this work avoids an extensive discussion of the impact of eminently domestic factors on MEPs’ parliamentary behaviour (such as electoral institutions or candidate selection procedures). In this respect, as this study represents only a preliminary analytical step towards a more precise understanding of the relationship that links national parties and Eurorepresentatives in Brussels, further research in this direction seems needed, which shall include a broader set of explanatory factors, both of endogenous and exogenous nature. Some of the possible implications deriving from different national settings will be however discussed in the final section.

### **MEPs’ European careers**

Notwithstanding the highly differentiated domestic traditions, what clearly emerges is that the candidate selection process appears by and large a matter of national competence dominated by the national parties. Consequentially, given the risk of de-selection, this aspect appears to be of primary concern for the Europarliamentarians and is thought to be a key source of nationally-oriented party control over MEPs’ voting behaviour vis-à-vis

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<sup>5</sup> Katz and Mair (1993) define the national parties in Western democracies as formed of three constituent faces: *the party in central office* (the extra-parliamentary party cadres), *the party in public office* (the party members in government positions or in parliament), and *the party on the ground* (the membership and the voters). In line with these assumptions, Bardi (2003; 2006) analysed the emergent transnational party federations (TPF) as the first appearance of a party in central office at European level (Mair, 2006). Accordingly, the EP party fractions are generally seen as an expression of the party in public office. The definition of a party on the ground at EU level presents much more difficulties given the well-known lack of a direct (electoral or participatory) link between citizens’ and Europarties. Nevertheless, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002; 2003) convincingly claimed that the role played by Europe in party programs and party competition at the national level can be seen to correspond to the more general interest in the politics of the party on the ground.



the European parliamentary leadership (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988). In the words of McElroy (2001: 4)

controlling access to the ballot is one of the primary methods of ensuring party discipline in parliamentary democracies. If a party can control the nomination process, it can monitor the cohesion of the party through the selection and de-selection of 'problem' candidates. [...] Not surprisingly, the political groups in the European Parliament fare poorly, in terms of cohesion and discipline.

To put it another way, by means of their monopoly in the candidate selection process, the national parties seem to counterbalance MEPs' functionalist shift of loyalties from the national periphery towards the EPG-centre (Scully, 1999).

Before moving on, a few words deserve to be spent defining the traits of our object of study and the extent to which (and through which organizational structures) the national party can influence MEPs' re-election via the selection and de-selection of the troublesome candidates. Depending on the nature and structure of the national setting in which the electoral process takes place, the candidate selection involves different partisan actors at different levels of the hierarchical pyramid of the party. In some member states characterized by unitary territorial structures and highly centralized party organization the selection of the Eurocandidates is mainly in the hands of the central leadership of the party (e.g. party council or executive committee). As we shift towards lower centralization we can assess a growing involvement of more decentralized bodies in the final decision (e.g. congress, regional electoral committee, party members via primary elections) and more pluralistic (territorial or ideological) instances represented in the candidate selection process. As a consequence, in this second case, the final outcome of the selection process will only partially reflect the wishes of the national leadership. It will rather represent a more blurred balance of diversified (and sometimes conflicting) instances originating from the constellation of actors involved in the process of selection and will mirror their relative weight in party's life. In this respect, Germany offers valid examples of decentralized selection processes. In particular,

as a result of [...] the strongly federal nature of German parties, the influence of national party is limited. [...] The CDU, CSU and SPD can normally expect to win enough EP seats

to obtain representation in all German regions. Hence, the regional power base is by far the single most important criterion for individual candidates to be placed on good position in the list (Poguntke, 2007: 118).

In addition, another relevant factor which may severely reduce the influence of the national party is the presence of candidate-centred electoral systems. The use of open lists increases the autonomy of the prospective MEPs vis-à-vis the national parties and the chances for troublesome MEPs to get re-elected, even without the party's blessing<sup>6</sup>. As clearly put by Hix (2004: 219) "national parties are more able to enforce their wishes on their MEPs in systems containing electoral institutions that provide these principals with strong controls".

Given the potential implications of these arguments, in this work the leadership of the 'party at home' is therefore defined in a wide connotation as the collective entity (be it centralized or decentralized, unitary or polycentric) which reflects the constellation of actors whose interests and instances drive and determine the direction of party's decisional, political, and institutional life. When it comes to the specific focus of our study, the weight of these specific actors appears to vary according to their degree of involvement in the candidate selection process (Faas, 2003). This definition seems satisfactory, as it appears conceptually broad enough to capture the polymorphous nature of our object of study in different and diversified national settings and, at the same time, fairly precise in defining the essential traits of the domestic leadership and its basic functions.

According to most of the scholars, the MEPs, when faced with difficult voting choices, appear to perform a cost-benefit reasoning and, at the same time, seem to present a fixed hierarchy of preferences with respect to their key objectives (Hix *et alii*, 1999; Hix, 2004). According to Faas (2003: 843)

re-election is the most important goal, since without it, there is neither office (within the legislature) nor policy (influence). The same holds true for office. Without office (i.e.,

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<sup>6</sup> According to Messmer (2003), the Labour government decided to adopt a system of 'closed list proportional representation' (CLPR) on the eve of the 1999 EP elections (abandoning the traditional first-pass-the-post rule) to grant higher influence to the party over the selection and list rank order of the Labour's candidates. See also Hix and Lord (1997).

without the strategic advantages of holding an important committee chair, for example), it is much harder to shape policy. Hence, legislators – whenever they have to – will give primary attention to re-election, followed by office-seeking and finally policy-seeking.

Faas (2003) presents an extensive analysis of the structural factors (electoral institutions, candidate selection procedures, EP formal and non-written rules), whose strength and mutual interaction impact the effectiveness of both the national and parliamentary cues. Following these arguments, the existence of such a given order of preferences implies evident consequences which are supposed to powerfully affect MEPs' voting behaviour both in terms of parliamentary loyalty and – more specifically – in the development of their political career within and outside the EP (Noury, 2002).

According to most of the scholars, the existence of a strong MEP-NPD link does not imply the absence of an incremental process of supranational socialization and does not prevent the emergence and the consolidation of greater European awareness among the MEPs. Both aspects represent two sides of the same coin (Scully, 1999). The recognition of multidimensional loyalties at EP level and of an autonomous role performed by the NPDs is therefore not in contrast with the recent claims towards a higher consolidation of the EP and its progressive institutional normalization along supranational lines (Hix, 2001a; Kreppel and Hix, 2003). Instead, it contributes to provide a more reliable picture of the actual parliamentary dynamics (Brzinski et al., 1998; Gabel and Hix, 2002; Hix and Lord, 1996). In this respect, Hix (2001a: 666) maintains that “if an issue is highly salient for a particular domestic party, and an MEP is torn between the positions of its EP party group and its domestic leadership, the MEP is likely to vote with its national party and against its EP group” in order to avoid costly sanctions from its national party and the risk of de-selection<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> In several specific cases other tools at disposal of the national side have been identified, along with the de-selection threat. Messmer (2003) describes the Labour party's strategy in this respect as based on a stick-and-carrot rationale, where MEPs' growing involvement in domestic party's life represents the carrot, and the risk of de-selection represents the stick. Hausemer (2006) and Hoyland (2006) discuss national parties' ability to allocate key committee positions and rapporteurships to reliable MEPs.

### **Domestic career: In Brussels, but thinking of home**

This phenomenon appears even more evident if we do not limit our analysis to the assessment of the short-term consequences and if we speculate beyond the boundaries of MEPs' European mandate, since "[they] might also be forced to pay attention to the interest of their home parties by their tendency to pursue a career outside the EP" (Faas, 2003: 845)<sup>8</sup>. In this respect, an additional point deserves to be properly touched, before moving on to the core part of the analysis. It deals with the very nature of the European mandate. Notwithstanding the growing number of MEPs which seem to pursue a genuine European parliamentary career (Scarrow, 1997; Verzichelli, 2004; Verzichelli and Edinger, 2005), it is widely assumed that most of the MEPs still regard the EP as a sort of 'springboard' or 'step stone' for a national career (Herman and Lodge, 1979; Kjaer, 2007) or as a 'retirement home' at the end of a national career (Hix, 2005), thereby considering a European mandate as a sort of 'second best option'<sup>9</sup>. According to Corbett (1998), the high level of parliamentary turnover at EP level clearly indicates the higher attractiveness of a political career at home. More in general, it is hardly disputable, that both in terms of political visibility and effectiveness, a national career is still more appealing than a European one. This phenomenon also originates from the second-order nature of the European elections whose salience is high for national political parties only to the extent that they serve as indicators of their (national) strength (Ferrara and Weishaupt, 2004) provided that the EP electoral contests do not affect their share of power at national level (Reif and Schmitt, 1980).

Given the lack of interest of the national parties in the European elections, in the eyes of many MEPs, the EP appears as a sort of 'second-order parliament' itself (Wessels, 1995) and the prospective of a return to national politics appears highly tempting, a sort of 'political enfranchisement' after the 'European exile' (Van Hulten and Clegg, 2003). In

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<sup>8</sup> See also Hix (2004).

<sup>9</sup> Verzichelli (2004; 2007) and Bardi and Ignazi (2004) proposed two different typologies of the Europarliamentarians, both based on MEPs' career paths and on the short-/long-term nature of their European commitment. In particular, Verzichelli identifies two analytical dimensions: MEPs' "length of involvement in EU institutions/affairs" and their "main political ambitions/achievements". Adopting an alternative analytical perspective, Taggart and Bale (2006) developed an alternative typology based on MEPs' role orientations and identified four ideal types: policy advocate, constituency representative, European evangelist, and institutionalist. The two perspectives are not in contrast, rather - by mutually interacting - they contribute to a wider understanding of the parliamentary dynamics at EP level.

the words of Kjaer (2001: 2) “the only way up is home”. In line with Kjaer’s view, Crum (2003: 4) asserts that “politicians themselves perceive their own careers primarily within the framework of the national parties that someday may well allow them a function at the national level again, and hence they only take a secondary interest in the European party-organization”.

From these brief insights three points emerge which appear to be of high relevance with respect to my analysis. These can be summarized as:

- the leadership of the domestic parties plays a key role in determining MEPs’ chances to get re-elected since it by and large shapes the candidate selection process at home; (Faas, 2003; Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Hix, 1999; McElroy, 2001);
- the MEPs have a clear set of preferences: among their goals the first and most important is re-election; (Brzinski et al., 1998; Faas, 2003; Gabel and Hix, 2002; Hix, 2004; Hix et al., 1999; Hix and Lord, 1996; Noury, 2002);
- the EP is perceived by most of the MEPs and by the national parties themselves as a ‘second-order legislature’ and, more in general, as a ‘second best option’; (Corbett, 1998; Crum, 2003; Herman and Lodge, 1979; Kjaer, 2001, 2007; Van Hulten and Clegg, 2003; Wessels, 1995).

Following these considerations, the ‘party at home’ seems to have at its disposal a formidable tool of control towards their MEPs thanks to the key role played in the candidate selection process. On the other hand, the MEPs appear to be fully aware of this. Our primary question is therefore: Do the domestic leaderships of the parties (via the NPDs) perform a sanctionary judgement when it comes to MEPs’ re-election? According to most of the authors mentioned above they do, at least to a certain extent. Consistently, Faas (2003: 847) maintains that “*if* national parties become involved in the process of voting in the EP and have the appropriate means to influence the proceedings, MEPs from national delegations are likely to defect in cases of conflict. In these cases, the party group leadership cannot do anything but accept it”. Do they become involved? Do they actually use those means to sanction MEPs’ non-conformist voting behaviour, first and foremost, their candidate selection prerogatives? So far we know that they *can*; but do

they actually *do* that? The answer is open, and we expect to find a high level of variance among the national delegations. However, in those cases in which the answer is yes, we shall suppose the existence of a link-system connecting the ‘party at home’ and the leadership of the NPD conceived as a sort of “transmission belt” (Ramiro and Morales, 2007: 153) between Brussels and the respective national capital. The establishment of an effective link-system requires the development of bidirectional informational channels and a fair degree of involvement of the leadership of the NPD in the decisional bodies of the national party (e.g. party council or executive committee). Messmer (2003: 208) describes in these terms the link-system developed by the Labour government during the 5<sup>th</sup> EP:

after the government whip is delivered to the EPLP [European Parliamentary Labour Party] whip’s office, there may be some last effort to find common ground, or the EPLP leadership may, if the issue and/or political stakes are high enough, attempt to have the government whip rescinded. However, such efforts notwithstanding, it is normal for the EPLP whip’s office to issue its own separate voting instructions to the EPLP requiring Labour MEPs to vote as the government has requested.

Messmer (2003: 210) adds that “the EPLP whip’s office began to function not only as a means of communication about voting preferences, but also as the eyes and ears of the EPLP leadership in spotting and dealing with rebellious MEPs”.

A recent study on the degree of Europeanization of the national parties in six member states published by Poguntke et al. (2007) has questioned the existence of an effective linkage between NPDs and ‘party at home’, thereby challenging the idea of an incremental process of adaptation endeavoured by the domestic leaderships due to the growing relevance of process of European integration. When it comes to the assessment of the relationship between ‘party at home’ and Eurorepresentatives the authors suggest three main implications: general apathy and lack of awareness of the domestic party towards the EP affairs, low levels of involvement of the MEPs in the structures of the domestic parties, and, consequentially, low levels of accountability of the MEPs vis-à-vis the domestic party. In addition, this trend – say the authors – does not seem to have evolved over time towards greater awareness. According to Poguntke the degree of

adaptive restructuring as a reaction to the Europeanization process has been limited and its scope very marginal. The authors conclude that “when it comes to the party leadership’s relations with party’s MEPs, both pre-election (when aspiring candidates are screened) and post-election (when policy coordination can be attempted), signs of significant change are somewhat harder to find” (Alyott et al., 2007: 208).

Notwithstanding the relevance of this contribution and its pioneering nature, witnessed by the wide debate generated among the scholarly community, some methodological limits of Poguntke’s work deserve to be discussed. In particular, several findings and their degree of generalizability seem questionable, primarily due to the small samples and the analytical dimensions included. The work relies on two types of informative sources: party documents (which tell the ‘official story’) and semi-structured elite interviews (thought to register non-written dynamics). When it comes to the latter some problems emerge which might severely impact the reliability of the results. In particular, the authors conducted some 150 interviews aimed at registering the degree of variance across three dimensions of analysis: member state (6 modalities), national party (30 modalities), and type of party of official (7 modalities). The problems of generalizability mainly arise as they develop their considerations by crossing the analytical dimensions and using multiple layers to filter the survey records. The result is a multitude of extremely small samples with very few cases whose analytical reliability can be easily questioned. For instance if we filter the 150 answers according to ‘type of party official’ and ‘national party’ the average number of respondents equals 0.71. The number of respondents increases at 3.57 if we consider ‘member state’ and ‘type of party official’ as layers. At member state level the number of respondents ranges from 13 (in France) to 32 (in Sweden). The adoption of a ‘most different system’ design does not help as it makes it does not facilitate the treatment of data aggregated according to inter-dimensional criteria (e.g. groups of countries). As clearly put by the authors “the countries were selected according to the logic of a ‘most different system’ design [...] this meant seeking to maximize variance in country-level factors such as date of entry, form of government, degree of territorial concentration, overall level of EU scepticism and the existence of a significant Eurosceptic party” (Carter et al., 2007: 17). In this respect, further research

seems much needed in order to provide stronger analytical reliability and higher chances for the generalization of the results.

The next sections of the paper assess the effectiveness of national parties' tools in controlling and shaping MEPs' actual voting behaviour and, more precisely, their likelihood to behave according to a 'sanction-benefit' assessment. I will therefore analyse MEPs' careers within and outside the EP as function of their allegiance to the national party lines (degree of national friendliness), thereby looking at their voting behaviour when a clear disagreement between NPD and EPG emerges. This specific aspect appears to be even more relevant in the light of a recent study put forward by Raunio (2000) which showed that about 40% of the NPDs issue precise voting instructions to their MEPs when votes 'of fundamental importance' are at stake. This point seems to contradict Poguntke's findings as it implies the existence of a somewhat stable informational flow between 'party at home' and NPD.

### **Assessing national parties' 'sanction-benefit attitude': two hypotheses to test**

In order to assess national parties' attitude to behave according to a 'sanction-benefit' mindset on the eve of an incoming EP election I will formulate two propositions which will be tested in the following sections. The hypotheses that will be present in this paragraph have been defined and designed consistently with the above-mentioned theoretical assumptions drawn from the literature.

In order to design a working hypothetical framework likely to provide reliable results a preliminary step seems much needed. It implies the identification of the defining traits and basic features of the phenomenon put to test, that is, national parties' 'sanction-benefit attitude'. The presence of such sanctionary judgement by the domestic parties characterizes first and foremost as a retrospective assessment of the voting behaviour of their MEPs. As suggested and clearly put by Noury and Roland (2002: 304), when it comes to the definition of the electoral lists and to the process of candidate selection the "legislators have the incentives to vote together with their party because of the rewards associated to party loyalty". Notwithstanding the existence of other powerful *stimuli* (loyalty to the EPG and personal or ideological preferences) and non-national incentives



(offices and policies), re-election seems a reason good enough which justifies MEPs' nationally-friendly behaviour. This seems primarily due to the realistic expectation that in case of non-conformist behaviour MEPs' re-election can be threatened and their electoral success jeopardized by the domestic leadership of the party. By definition, the strength and effectiveness of party leadership's interference in the process of candidate selection is not equal for all the parties in all the member states, but varies according to distinct factors. It is important to mention the nature of member states' national electoral rules (party- vs. candidate-centred) and parties' candidate selection procedures (centralized vs. decentralized). While proportional representation is the rule since 1999, each member state is still free to adopt different vote-counting procedures and the range of options chosen is even broader when it comes to the candidate selection procedures adopted by the national parties.

Considering that about 86% of the time – as suggested by Hix (2001b: 16) – the EPGs and the affiliated NPDs share the same voting preferences, the votes of national 'strategic relevance' where the interests of the 'party at home' and of the European group diverge are likely to represent a matter of primary concern for a sanctionist domestic leadership when it comes to the assessment of MEPs' individual voting performance<sup>10</sup>. In this sense, MEPs' voting choices are therefore expected to directly affect their electoral chances. In case of NPD-EPG conflict on a specific vote, the agents-MEPs are likely to become the objective of opposite pressures exerted by their two principals: the NPD and the EPG. Both available choices (voting 'nationally' or in line with the group), present risks and advantages. As suggested by Faas (2003) and Hix (2001a) in those cases the MEPs are generally more likely to vote in line with their delegation since they seem to be fully aware of the risk of de-selection. On the other hand, if we assume that the party *cares* (i.e. the existence of a sanctionary behaviour), the non-conformist MEPs are likely to face a sanction; the extreme consequence of a prolonged dissenting behaviour might be therefore the exclusion from party lists. Alternatively, those who vote 'nationally' (when asked to do so) are more likely to be considered loyal and politically reliable by their domestic leadership and therefore seem to have, on average, more chances to get their

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<sup>10</sup> See also Hix (2004).

ultimate reward: re-election. Assuming a 'sanction-benefit' rationale, the behaviour of the domestic leadership is totally reasonable. By following this stick-and-carrot logic, the boss(es) at home simply try to minimize MEPs' dangerous defections in the upcoming parliament. By reducing the number of rebel MEPs they attempt therefore to secure a more loyal contingent of 'agents' likely to support party preferences in Brussels (whenever required to do so). Hix (2001b: 14-15) reports two anecdotes which might well help to better understand the perceived relevance of the phenomenon: two prominent MEPs, Jean Pierre-Cot (the leader of the French socialist delegation between 1989 and 1994) and Carole Tongue (a senior member of the British Labour), after four European mandates were placed low down in the party lists in 1999 electoral rounds as punishment for refusing to follow nationally-salient instructions from their respective national capitals. As a consequence, both failed to get elected again. Hix (2001b: 15) concludes that "most MEPs know *whether* their national parties can punish defection, and hence do not find themselves in the positions of Mr. Cot and Ms. Tongue". The fact that the party *can* punish defection does not imply that it actually does that or that it finds such behaviour opportune or suitable.

As far as the definition of a reliable set of hypotheses is concerned, the aim of this section is to identify the characteristics of an idealtypic sanctionary character. This will render my set of hypothetical propositions as much sensitive as possible to the sanctionary phenomenon, thereby detecting in a more precise way its repercussions on MEPs' careers. The highest possible degree of sanctionary character would therefore imply MEPs' careers to be perfectly and directly related to MEPs' nationally-friendly parliamentary conduct. The reality is, however, more complex and other endogenous and exogenous factors (most of them listed above) are deemed to play a role in determining MEPs' electoral success; the same holds true when it comes to the determinants of their voting behaviour. An effort towards relativization seems therefore necessary. Accordingly, I suppose that the most loyal MEPs have greater chances to be favoured by their domestic leadership and finally to get re-elected, whereas those with a high number of 'bad records' in nationally-strategic votes are more likely to be excluded from (or put down in) the party lists. Given these considerations, the first hypothesis to test the presence of party-based 'sanction-benefit' attitudes can be formulated as follows:

**H1.** The higher one MEP's level of loyalty towards her/his national party delegation, the higher the likelihood of his/her re-election.

The second step to complete the process of definition my hypotheses addresses the very institutional nature of the EP itself and reflects its alleged nature of 'diminished legislature'. It implies a functional overlap of two distinct conceptual dimensions: national parties' sanctionary character and EP second-orderness. If we assume a European parliamentary career to represent only a 'second best' option in the eyes of most of the MEPs and their consequential eagerness to go back home as national representatives and fully enfranchised politicians, there is no reason to rule out the continuation of domestic retrospective sanctionary attitudes at this stage. Accordingly, Noury and Roland (2002: 304) maintain that, in case of prolonged non-conformist behaviour, "national parties may affect the future careers of the MEPs in their own country by denying them eligibility for country elections or denying them other public mandates". In this respect, before moving on, one point deserves to be properly emphasized, first and foremost in order to prevent unnecessary confusion in the next and more advanced stages of the analysis.

The widespread assumption of a still lower status for the European parliamentarians vis-à-vis their national counterparts (perceived both by many representatives themselves and by their national leadership) does not imply that all the MEPs share this perception, but simply presupposes – as primarily confirmed by the high turnover and the persistent inter-level migration (Corbett, 1998) – that most of them evidently do. To conclude, it is assumed that, if a domestic leadership selects its Eurocandidates according to a retrospective sanctionary logic, the same attitude seems even more likely to take place when that leadership has to decide which MEPs actually deserve to be sent back home. A more intransigent application of the sanctionary logic is justified by the perceived higher political relevance of the parliamentary role at home and by the limited number of domestic seats available to the former MEPs. To put it simply, if a European re-election can be regarded by most of the MEPs as a *reward* in exchange for a proper legislative behaviour, the promotion to the national parliament can be seen with good reason as the

most desired *prize* attainable only by the most loyal among the loyal<sup>11</sup>. If “the only way up is home” as nicely put by Kjaer (2001: 2) we can confidently hypothesize that, if H1 proves to be true:

**H2.** Among the reliable MEPs, the most nationally-loyal are the most likely to be sent back to their national capitals.

### Case selection process and data

In order to assess the weight and the effectiveness of national party delegations’ role in shaping and controlling MEPs’ voting behaviour it was hypothesized in the previous section the existence of a direct – even though imperfect – relationship between MEPs’ national friendliness and their electoral chances both within and outside the EP. To test the propositions focus is placed on two different streams of data. On the one hand, the paper will look at MEPs’ voting records (in relation to the preferences of their two principals), on the other hand, it will look back at their parliamentary tenure and at the key developments which marked their recent European and national career in the last nine years, assuming the latter to be a function of the former. This section will describe the criteria adopted to select the cases for comparison and the nature of the data employed in the analysis.

**TABLE 1. Case selection**

Member state	Main party of the left	Main party of the right	Other
France	PS (18 MEPs)	-	-
Germany	SPD (36 MEPs)	CDU (42 MEPs)	-
Italy	DS (15 MEPs)	FI (23 MEPs)	-
Portugal	PS (13 MEPs)	PSD (11 MEPs)	-
Spain	PSOE (23 MEPs)	PP (31 MEPs)	-
United Kingdom	Labour (30 MEPs)	Conservatives (36 MEPs)	Liberal-Democrats (11 MEPs)

<sup>11</sup> Two categories of MEPs do not fit this reasoning and cannot therefore be included in this discourse: the senior national politicians at the end of their domestic career (Europensioners) and the growing number of MEPs which are pursuing a genuine European parliamentary career (Scarow, 1997; Verzichelli, 2004; Verzichelli and Edinger, 2005).

SOURCES: European Parliament website [<http://www.europarl.europa.eu>], European Elections 2004 web portal [<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2004/ep-election/sites/en/index.html>]. LEGEND: Socialist Party (French: *Parti Socialiste*, PS), Social Democratic Party of Germany (German: *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD), Christian Democratic Union of Germany (German: *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*, CDU), Democrats of the Left (Italian: *Democratici di Sinistra*, DS), Forward Italy (Italian: *Forza Italia*, FI), Socialist Party (Portuguese: *Partido Socialista*, PS), Social Democratic Party (Portuguese: *Partido Social Democrata*, PSD), Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (Spanish: *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE), People's Party (Spanish: *Partido Popular*, PP).

In order to guarantee the highest possible degree of analytical reliability and generalizability of the results and inferences a wide sample of 12 national party delegations were selected [see Table 1]. In order to prevent unwelcomed distortions of the results due to exogenous factors (stemming from different specificities of the electoral process at national and party level) not included in the model, a 'most similar system' design has been adopted. Most of the countries included in the study belong to the so called EU heavy-weights (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and United Kingdom). The only exception is represented by Portugal. The main reason that justifies the inclusion of this country is the almost perfect bipartisan nature of the Portuguese party system which guarantees the Portuguese cohorts to be large enough to be put to test confidently. The sample consists of delegations belonging to all the three major European parliamentary groups, namely: the European People's Party-European Democrats (EPP-ED), the Socialist group (PES), and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). The total number of MEPs composing the sample equals therefore 289 units. The average number of MEPs per delegation is 24. The largest NPD (the German Christian-Democrats) includes 42 MEPs, whereas the smallest ones (the Portuguese Social-Democrats and the British liberal-democrats) comprise 11 MEPs each. It was deliberately decided not to include smaller delegation, with less than 10 representatives, in order to preserve the external validity as well as the reliability of my inferences. Given these premises, the rule of selection adopted to choose the 12 NPDs appears very clear and straightforward: the largest party of the right and the major party of the left where included *de jure* in all the 6 countries. The only two partial exceptions are represented by France (with only 1 NPD) and the UK (with 3 NPDs). The centre-right half of the French political spectrum appeared to suffer from a high degree of fractionalization during the 5<sup>th</sup> EP. This made it virtually impossible to identify with a good degree of confidence a 'key delegation' (large enough) among the five centre-right movements represented at EP

level between 1999 and 2004<sup>12</sup>. The fractionalization of the Gaullist forces coupled with the low level of institutionalization of the French party system seems to be a deep rooted structural feature of the French party system, only recently overcome with the foundation of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) in 2002 (Ladrech, 2007: 89). When it comes to the British case, the exclusion of the liberal-democrats would have severely reduced the explanatory power of my analysis considering both the electoral relevance of the party in the 1999 European elections (which polled 12.7% of the votes and gained 11 seats<sup>13</sup>) and its leading role within the ranks of the ALDE group. In this respect, it is important to mention that in 2002, Graham Watson, a senior British MEP, was appointed as parliamentary leader of the liberal group in the EP.

Finally, in all the delegations included in the sample the governing bodies of the party exert a fairly strong impact on the definition of the electoral lists. When it comes to federal or regional states (like Germany or Spain) the process appears more decentralized, but the logic behind the selection procedures does not change sensibly. Five out of six countries present systems of closed-lists<sup>14</sup>. Italy and Northern Ireland represent partial exceptions in this respect as they present an open ballot structure, which appears however counterbalanced by high levels of centralization in the candidate selection process (Faas 2003; Hix 2004; Scully and Farrell 2003).

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<sup>12</sup> Union for French Democracy (French: *Union pour la Démocratie Française*, UDF) 9 MEPs, Rally for the Republic (French: *Rassemblement pour la République*, RPR) 6 MEPs, Liberal Democracy (French: *Démocratie libérale*, DL) 4 MEPs, plus 2 independent MEPs.

<sup>13</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.europarl.org.uk/guide/Elections/elections1999.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> Namely France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom (with the exclusion of Northern Ireland).

**TABLE 2. National elections in six EU member states (1999-2008)**

Member state	General elections
France	June 2002*, May 2007
Germany	September 2002*, September 2005
Italy	May 2001*, April 2006, April 2008
Portugal	March 2002*, February 2005
Spain	March 2000*, March 2004*, March 2008
United Kingdom	June 2001*, May 2005

LEGEND: The asterisk (\*) denotes the election which took place during the 5<sup>th</sup> EP term, from July 1999 to April 2004.

The previous section hypothesized that MEPs' voting performance in the 5<sup>th</sup> EP exerts a direct impact on their European and/or national future career after the end of their mandate. To test this hypothesis, along with the 2004 European elections, all the national general elections which took place between June 1999 and 2008 have been taken into consideration, in order capture the highest possible number of national promotions [see Table 2]. To put it simply, the greater the number of electoral contests included, the higher the chances to identify a conspicuous number of former-MEPs which have been given the opportunity to pursue a national parliamentary career at home. Those who started their national career in the course of their EP term and gave up their European seat in advance can be therefore labelled as 'early retired' MEPs, whereas *most* of those who got elected after the natural end of their mandate simply did not put forward a new European candidature, waiting for their national chance. Even in this case 'most' does not mean 'all'. Early retirements of re-elected MEPs were not rare in the 6<sup>th</sup> EP, especially in those countries which held their first post-2004 election several years later, like France (May 2007) and Spain (March 2008). The last election included in the study took place in Italy in April 2008. In this respect, it is assumed that a temporal distance of four years (from 2004 to 2008) does not limit national parties' faculty to perform a retrospective assessment of the activity of their former MEPs. On the whole, 14 national elections have been taken into consideration. Seven of them took place between 1999 and 2004, whereas the others followed the conclusion of the 5<sup>th</sup> EP legislature. Italy and Spain experienced three electoral contests between 1999 and 2008, whereas the other four countries only

two. We cannot therefore exclude a structural imbalance of opportunities among the former MEPs of the 12 member states analysed.

Before concluding this paragraph, it has to be mentioned that also a limited number of local and regional careers have been included. In particular, only those whose perceived political relevance and status seemed by and large comparable to those expressed by a national parliamentary career have been taken into consideration. However, these aspects, by definition, vary greatly from country to country and their political significance depends from eminently national specificities whose very nature can be hardly fully understood by an external observer. These characteristics make their interpretation inherently tricky and subjected to a high level arbitrariness. Considering these structural limits and the high risk of bias, the number of the sub-national careers included in the analysis has been deliberately kept as lowest as possible.

A few words deserve to be spent to describe the process of data collection. As for the sources used to reconstruct the career of the 289 MEPs, I primarily relied on the large amount of biographical information provided by the institutional websites of the European parliament<sup>15</sup> and of the national parliaments<sup>16</sup> of the six countries. The same procedure was adopted for the regional legislative assemblies and, more in general, for the few sub-national institutions identified as ‘politically influential at national level’. However, at that stage, the retrieval of the data required for conducting an appropriate analysis proved to be more difficult and the quality of the data themselves – on average – lower. Given such structural limits, in order to obtain a more precise and reliable outline

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<sup>15</sup>European Parliament - Archive of the MEPs

[<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/members/archive.do?language=EN>].

<sup>16</sup> The biographical sections of the following parliaments have been widely consulted: National Assembly

[[http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/tribun/xml/liste\\_alpha.asp](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/tribun/xml/liste_alpha.asp)] and Senate

[<http://www.senat.fr/elus.html>] (France), Federal Diet [<http://www.bundestag.de/mdb/bio/index.html>] and

Federal Council [[http://www.bundesrat.de/cln\\_090/nn\\_9030/DE/organe-mitglieder/mitglieder/a-](http://www.bundesrat.de/cln_090/nn_9030/DE/organe-mitglieder/mitglieder/a-z/uebersicht-a-c-node.html?__nnn=true)

[z/uebersicht-a-c-node.html?\\_\\_nnn=true](http://www.bundesrat.de/cln_090/nn_9030/DE/organe-mitglieder/mitglieder/a-z/uebersicht-a-c-node.html?__nnn=true)] (Germany), Chamber of Deputies

[<http://www.camera.it/deputatism/240/documentoxml.asp>] and Senate

[<http://www.senato.it/leg/16/BGT/Schede/Attsen/Sena.html>] (Italy), Assembly of the Republic

[<http://www.parlamento.pt/DeputadoGP/Paginas/Deputados.aspx>] (Portugal), Congress of Deputies

[<http://www.congreso.es/portal/page/portal/Congreso/Congreso/Diputados>] and Senate

[<http://www.senado.es/legis9/senadores/index.html>] (Spain), House of Commons

[<http://www.parliament.uk/directories/hciolists/alms.cfm>] and House of Lords

[[http://www.parliament.uk/directories/house\\_of\\_lords/information\\_office/alphabetical\\_list\\_of\\_members.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/directories/house_of_lords/information_office/alphabetical_list_of_members.cfm)] (United Kingdom).



of MEPs' recent *Curriculum Vitae* I amended and integrated the records provided by the primary institutional sources with a patient activity of information-picking. This second step implied the use of a wider and more variegated range of sources: specific quasi-academic databases<sup>17</sup>, websites of French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and British news agencies<sup>18</sup>, and multilingual news banks and search engines<sup>19</sup>. Considering the slow updating process which too often affects the official websites of both national and sub-national institutions, the procedure of double checking proved to be extremely useful in order to fill the frequent temporal/biographical gaps. More in general, it contributed to prevent analytical imprecision and inexactness which could have put at risk the reliability of my data, and, in the latter instance, of my inferences.

Individual intra-delegation defections (MEPs' non-conformist behaviour) as well as the average of nationally-oriented votes in the 5<sup>th</sup> EP will be measured by means of roll-call vote (RCV) records. The data used in this study has been gathered by different teams of scholars and researchers within the framework of the VoteWorld project, whose primary aim is "to archive, maintain, and distribute datasets of roll-call voting from legislative bodies throughout the international community"<sup>20</sup>. The collection covers the U.S. Congress (data are available from 1789 to 2000), the UN General Assembly (from 1946 to 1972), and the European Parliament (from the first elected EP to 2004). The EP-branch of the project includes more than 15,000 records (5,745 for the 5<sup>th</sup> EP) collected by Simon Hix, Abdul Noury, and Gerard Ronald (2006)<sup>21</sup>. Along with MEPs' voting records<sup>22</sup>, the dataset also contains additional pieces of information on each MEP, such as name, member state, national party, EP group.

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<sup>17</sup> Rulers [<http://www.rulers.org/>] and World Political Leaders [<http://www.terra.es/personal2/monolith/00index2.htm>].

<sup>18</sup> Agence France Press [<http://www.afp.com/>], Deutsche Presse – Agentur GmbH [<http://www.dpa.com/>], ANSA [<http://www.ansa.it/>], Agencia Lusa [<http://www.lusa.pt/>], Agencia EFE [<http://www.efe.es/>], Reuters [<http://www.reuters.com/>].

<sup>19</sup> News and Information on Wikio [<http://www.wikio.com/>] and PIPL [<http://www.pipl.com/>]

<sup>20</sup> Retrieved from [http://ucdata.berkeley.edu:7101/new\\_web/VoteWorld/voteworld/](http://ucdata.berkeley.edu:7101/new_web/VoteWorld/voteworld/).

<sup>21</sup> More details regarding the nature of the data and the methodology can be found at <http://personal.lse.ac.uk/hix/HixNouryRolandEPdata.HTM>.

<sup>22</sup> Among the voting options, Yes, No, and Abstentions have been included, while "Present but did not vote" and "either absent or not an MEP" have been recoded as missing values.

In this context it is also of great relevance to explain the nature of the data collected which by and large represent the backbone of my empirical analysis. The above mentioned votes present several noteworthy characteristics, which deserve to be properly discussed. When RCV is requested, the voting choice (Yes, No, Abstention) of each MEP is recorded in the minutes, thereby providing the exact position of each legislator on a specific vote. The RCVs represent only a portion of all the votes casted by the plenary<sup>23</sup>, all the other voting procedures – either by a show of hands or by ‘electronic vote’ – do not register the way how each individual MEP votes. The RCVs are usually called by the political groups. According to Hix (2002) and Carrubba (2002) the RCV procedure is typically requested by the parliamentary leadership for achieving two specific goals. On the one hand, group’s leadership might be keen to exert extra pressures on its MEPs, thereby urging them to vote more cohesively, provided the more concrete risk of parliamentary sanction. On the other hand, it gives the possibility to show other groups’ internal divisions. Therefore, when calling RCVs, the groups are generally driven by self-promotion goals either to show their position to the public or to mortify other groups (Corbett et al., 2000). Given these premises, consequences at individual level are very likely to take place as far as MEPs’ voting attitudes are concerned. We might assume that MEPs have stronger incentives to act cohesively when RCV procedure is called on a specific vote. If group’s sanctionary tools work properly the risks of sanctions in terms of both policy- and office-seeking in case of defections powerfully increase, given EPG leadership’s faculty to identify specific rebel or nationally-oriented MEPs. As a consequence, we can suppose MEPs’ defections to slightly decrease in case of RCV procedure.

According to several scholars, the analyses based on RCV records might suffer from a structural bias determined by the particular nature of this procedure (Settembri, 2005). In this respect, Carrubba et al. (2002: 2) assert that

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<sup>23</sup> According to the article 160.1 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament “the vote shall be taken by roll call if so requested in writing by a political group or at least forty Members the evening before the vote unless the President sets a different deadline”. In addition, it states that “votes shall be recorded in the minutes of the sitting by political group in the alphabetical order of Members’ names, with an indication of how they voted” [<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getLastRules.do?language=EN&reference=TOC>].

the European Parliament has historically only used roll calls about a third of the time [...]. If this third is a random sample of the universe of legislative votes, our inferences about legislative behaviour should be unbiased. However, if this third is not a random sample, we cannot be sure of drawing accurate conclusions about legislative behaviour from roll calls without explicitly accounting for the selection process.

On the other hand, Hix (2002: 693) replies that RCVs

covered a broad range of issues on the European Union agenda. And, roll-call votes do not appear to be called disproportionately by one EP party or another. Hence, without empirical evidence to prove that roll-call voting is systematically biased towards a particular EP party or set of issues, it is reasonable to assume that these votes should produce a fairly accurate picture of voting behaviour in the EP.

Notwithstanding their controversial nature, the analysis of RCV records represents by far the most effective means currently available for the study of MEPs' legislative behaviour from an empirical perspective.

This study will consider only those votes marked by manifest disagreement between the two principals and characterized by opposite majorities of MEPs at delegation and group level. In other words, this analysis specifically refers to those cases when the modal vote of the majority of the European group differs from the modal vote of the majority of its affiliated national delegation. This supplementary filter seems to guarantee both the 'national saliency' of the votes included (the parties *care* when the vote matters) and a clearer identification of the voting preferences of the two principals. The goodness of this choice is confirmed by Hix (2004: 204) who maintains that "if national party is sure that its MEPs will follow its voting instructions and vote against their European party group, then it will not hesitate to issue the instructions; however if the national party is unsure whether its MEPs will follow its instructions, it may decide not to issue them in the first place".

Finally, concerning the case selection procedure, the following five categories of former MEPs have been automatically excluded from the analysis and therefore labelled as 'missing'.

- those whose age was higher than 70 in 2004 and failed to win a European (6<sup>th</sup> EP), national, or regional seat<sup>24</sup>;
- those whose absences were higher than 90% in the 5<sup>th</sup> EP;
- those who resigned before the natural conclusion of their European mandate (5<sup>th</sup> EP) and failed to win a national or regional seat;
- those who died in the course of their mandate (5<sup>th</sup> EP) or soon later;
- those serving in non-elected chambers after the conclusion of their European mandate (5<sup>th</sup> EP) (e.g. the House of Lords).

On the whole, the number of automatically-excluded MEPs equals 24 units and accounts for only 8.3% of the MEPs considered<sup>25</sup>. Their exclusion seems therefore not to put at risk the explanatory power of this study, while simultaneously guaranteeing a higher degree of analytical reliability.

### **Methodology: A three-step test**

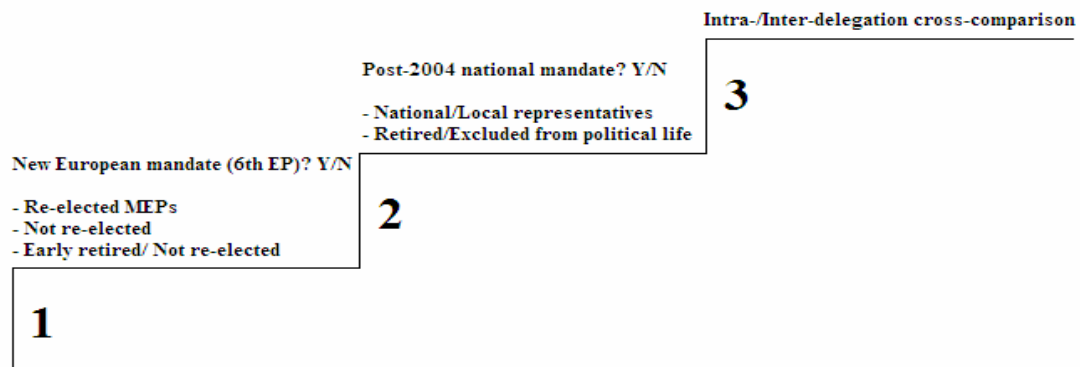
To put the hypotheses to test, a multiple-step experiment has been performed which entails three consecutive and incremental stages of data refinement, the last of which is deemed to register the presence/absence of a party-based retrospective sanctionary attitude in the process of candidate selection [see Figure 1].

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<sup>24</sup> This threshold represents a useful filter to exclude from the analysis those Europensioners who were approaching the very end of their European career in 2004.

<sup>25</sup> It is noteworthy, that some of the 24 MEPs shared more than one of the above-mentioned conditions for exclusion.

**FIGURE 1. Three-step test**



The *first step* involves a categorization of the 289 MEPs according to their electoral fortunes in the 2004 European elections, after the conclusion of their mandate (5<sup>th</sup> EP). Accordingly, three groups of MEPs can be identified: ‘Re-elected MEPs’, ‘Not re-elected’, and ‘Early retired/ Not re-elected’<sup>26</sup>.

The *second step* entails a further distinction among those MEPs belonging to the ‘Not re-elected’ category, addressing their ability to get a seat at home following the end of their European mandate. Two sub-groups can be recognized: ‘National/Local representatives’ and ‘Retired/Excluded from political life’.

<sup>26</sup> In this respect a few considerations seem necessary regarding the imperfect match between *selection* and *election*. The fact that the leadership of a party sponsors specific candidates (by granting them good positions in party’s lists) and opposes others, does not automatically imply the electoral success of the party’s preferred ones. Especially in those systems which are marked by candidate-centred electoral institutions (e.g. STV method in Ireland) other factors play a significant role along with party’s blessing (Hix, 2004). In this respect party’s support might be better described as a necessary but not sufficient condition for re-election. This work does not refer to the actual lists of candidates (available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2004/ep-election/sites/en/yourvoice/index.html>). This operation presents many methodological inconveniences and implies a high level of arbitrariness. Every case would require *ad hoc* interpretation based on eminently national criteria (accounting for differences in each country’s electoral rules, district magnitude as well as party’s electoral expectations in terms of votes). In the systems characterized by closed electoral lists the interpretation of the data seems even more problematic. Which position in the list can be identified as the threshold beyond which it is possible to identify on MEP’s substantial (if not official) exclusion? These considerations seem to stem from hardly predictable factors of very specific nature. For these reasons, it was decided to limit observations to the final outcome of the electoral process (‘re-elected’ vs. ‘not re-elected’ MEPs). Many candidates, even among those favoured by the leadership of the party, will lose their seat (possibly due to party’s negative electoral performance). Similarly, some opposed by the ‘party at home’ may well get elected. What we are interested in is however the other side of the relationship. We assume – as a general rule – that most of successful candidates are rather supported by the national leadership of their respective party.

The *third* and *final step* consists of a comparison among the average levels of defection of the MEPs belonging to the three groups defined above: 'National/Local representatives', 'Re-elected MEPs', and 'Retired/Excluded from political life'.

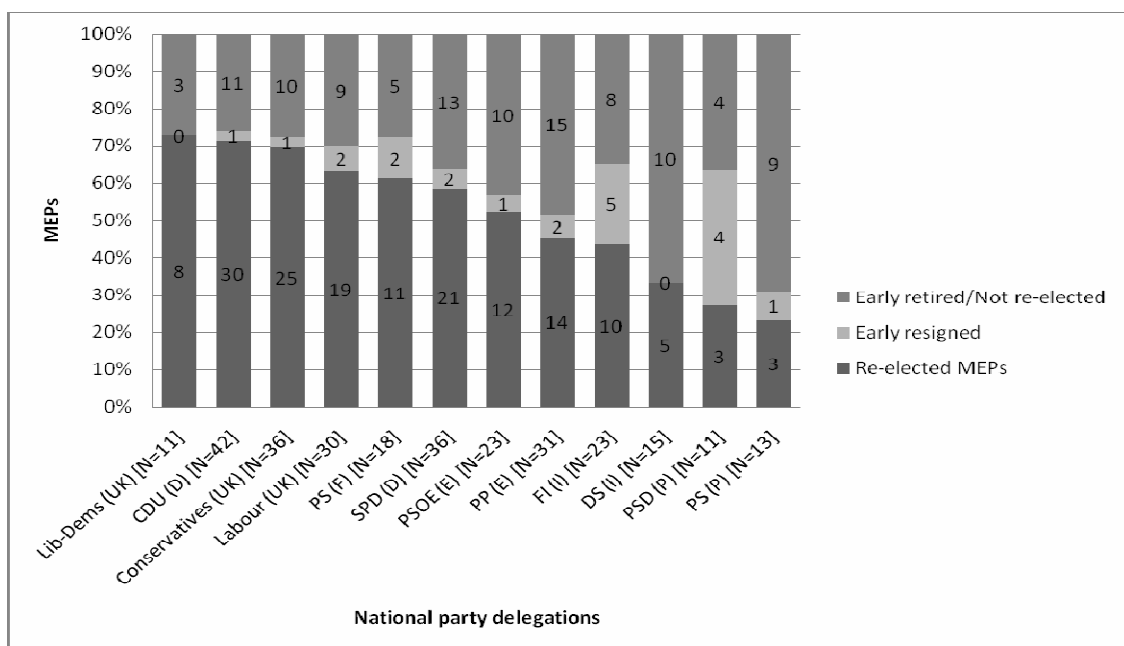
Throughout the three successive steps, the 12 NPDs will be adopted as units of analysis. The voting performance of MEPs belonging to different national delegations will be therefore analysed separately, according to their partisan affiliation. What we will expect in the case of parties' sanctionary behaviour is the group of 'National/Local representatives' to yield the lowest level of defection, followed by the 'Re-elected MEPs'. On the contrary we shall expect the group of 'Retired/Excluded' MEPs to emerge as the least loyal one. The measure used to calculate and compare intra-delegation levels of defection is the NPD's absolute defection rate. It represents the average ratio of non-conformist votes for each of the three above-mentioned categories of MEPs. On the other hand, in order to compare the share of non-conformist votes among the 12 delegations the study will make use of the NPDs' relative defection rate. This index can be obtained by dividing the absolute defection rate of each MEP belonging to the three sub-groups by the average ratio of non-conformist votes of their respective delegation. The main advantage of using the relative rather than the absolute defection rate is to relativize the differences in the levels of defection among the delegations, thereby making them statistically comparable.

As a matter of fact, while the method of analysis chosen seems to grant satisfactory results at aggregate level, the use of more sophisticated statistics could allow stronger inferences about MEPs' individual behaviour. One possible alternative could be the use of multivariate analysis. However, at this stage of my analysis, I am particularly interested in the identification of recurrent behavioural patterns at aggregate level and I believe that, in this respect, simple figures can deliver far more readable results, without losing too much of the complexity of the phenomenon. An analysis at individual level would imply the inclusion of other explanatory factors and control variables which, so far, have been excluded from my model.

## Results and empirical findings

This section presents the empirical results of the analysis. It will first start with the discussion of the two preliminary steps, thereby setting up the three sub-groups of MEPs and assessing the level of variance between the 12 NPDs taken into consideration. It then moves on to comparatively estimate national parties' attitude to behave according to a retrospective 'sanction-benefit mindset'.

**FIGURE 2. Turnover between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> EP**



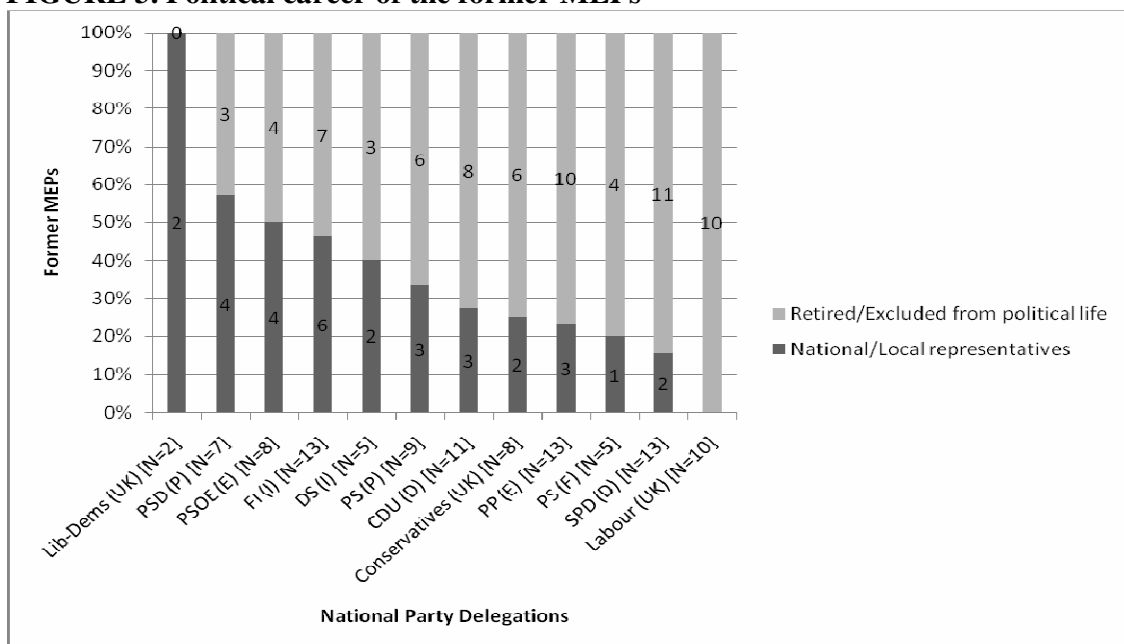
SOURCE: European Parliament website [<http://www.europarl.europa.eu>]. NOTE: Missing values included.

If we look at the turnover between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> EP we can assess a high level of variance among the 12 delegations [see Figure 2]. The average share of re-elected MEPs equals 51.74%. The British liberal-democrats represent by far the NPD with the highest number of re-elected MEPs (8 out of 11, accounting for more than 70% of the total), followed by the German Christian-democrats (with 30 MEPs, 71.43%), and by the British Conservatives (with 25 MEPs, 69.44%). On the other hand, the Portuguese socialist delegation experienced the highest level of turnover: only 3 out of 13 MEPs (23.08%) won a new European mandate in the 2004 elections. On the whole, the British, the German, and the French delegations present a good level of MEPs' individual tenure between the two legislatures; whereas the six Mediterranean NPDs performed poorly,

with a share of re-elected MEPs generally lower than 50%. Similarly, the phenomenon of MEPs' early resignations does not seem to uniformly affect all the delegations; rather it appears to vary significantly among the twelve. In this respect, *Forza Italia* and the Portuguese social-democrats present the highest number of MEPs who stepped out before the natural conclusion of their European mandate, respectively 5 (21.74%) and 4 (36.36%), whereas both the British liberal-democrats and the Italian Socialist delegation did not experience this phenomenon.

It is noteworthy to mention that all the 289 MEPs (included those labelled as 'missing') have been computed since this does not seem to alter the nature of the results in this preliminary stage of the analysis, while providing a more complete representation of the turnover at EP level. From now on, the number of MEPs considered in the statistics will rather decrease to 265.

**FIGURE 3. Political career of the former MEPs**



NOTE: Missing values excluded.

When it comes to the assessment of MEPs' post-2004 careers, it becomes clear that only a minority of 'Not re-elected' (107) or 'Early retired' (21) Eurorepresentatives proved successful to get elected at home, whereas a majority of them (72 out of 104, 69.23%) failed to win a seat both at European and national level and have been therefore



categorized as 'Retired/Excluded from political life' [see Figure 3]. On the whole, the total number of former MEPs categorized as 'National/Local representatives' equals 32 units (30.77%). If we look more closely at the specificities of the single national cases, the three British delegations are characterized by a considerable degree of inter-delegation variance. All the ten former Labour MEPs have been categorized as 'Retired/Excluded from political life', whereas both the 'Not re-elected' liberal-democratic MEPs successfully stood for the 2005 general elections and secured a seat in the House of Commons. The average ratio between the two sub-groups in the conservative cohorts is respectively 75% (6 retired/excluded MEPs) and 25% (2 promoted MEPs)<sup>27</sup>. Only two other NPDs present a majority of 'nationally-successful' MEPs: the Portuguese social-democrats (57.14%) and the Spanish socialists (50%). Unlike in the previous step, such differences do not seem to follow any clear national trend. Moreover, the number of elections held at national level (2 vs. 3) does not emerge as a relevant explanatory factor, thereby ruling out the possibility of a structural imbalance of opportunities. Before concluding, it is noteworthy to mention that only 5 'nationally-relevant' regional mandates<sup>28</sup> have been identified which represents only 15.63% of the overall number of domestic mandates. On the whole, the 265 MEPs which will perform the test have been categorized as follows: a majority of them, 161 (60.75%), falls into the 'Re-elected MEPs' category, 32 (12.08%) have been identified as 'National/Local representatives' and 72 (27.17%) as 'Retired/Excluded from political life'.

Following these two preliminary steps, we are now ready to look at the actual significance of party-based sanctionary attitudes in relation to MEPs' post-2004 electoral fortunes. Seven out of twelve delegations can be identified as 'close to the sanctionary idealtype', namely the Portuguese social-democrats, the French socialist, the German social-democrats, the Spanish socialists, and the three British delegations [see Figure 4]. All the seven aforementioned NPDs follow the trend hypothesized in the methodological

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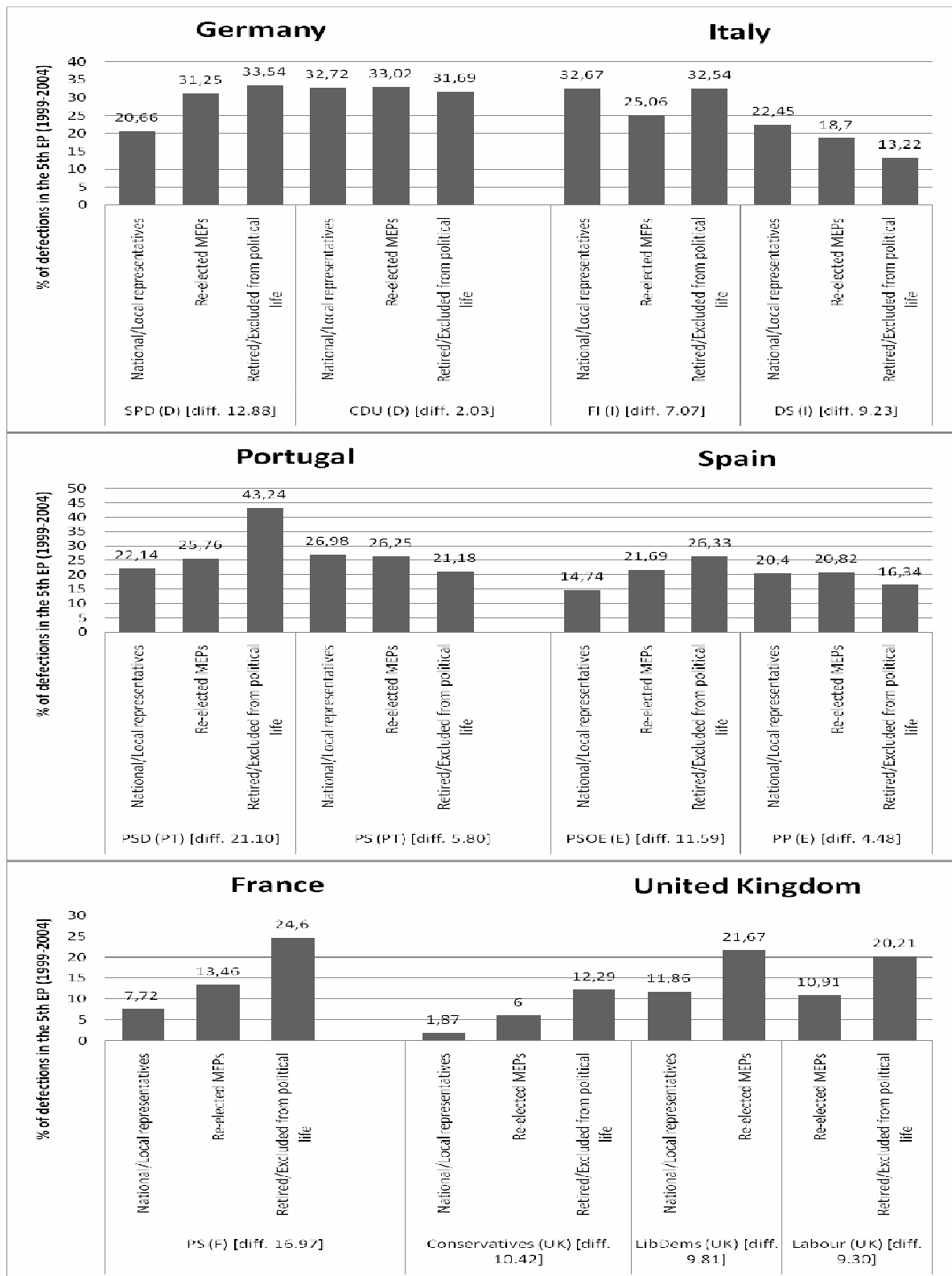
<sup>27</sup> In the British sample, the three 'Not Re-elected' MEPs serving in the House of Lords have been excluded from the computation, namely, Lord Inglewood and the Earl of Stockton (Conservatives), and Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne (Liberal-Democrats).

<sup>28</sup> Two former MEPs won regional seats in Germany and Spain, while three of them served as Mayors of very large and 'politically-relevant' cities.

section. The absolute defection rate of the second group of representatives (Re-elected MEPs) is lower than that performed by the third (Retired/Excluded from political life), but higher than that displayed by the first (National/Local representatives). Given the absence of Labour 'National/Local representatives' and of Liberal-democrat 'Retired/Excluded' MEPs, in these two specific cases a full comparison among the three categories of MEPs cannot be performed, but the pattern is equally evident as confirmed by the relevant differences between the two categories of MEPs respectively included. The phenomenon appears stronger in several delegations and more moderate in others. If we look at the two charts above, the different degrees of intensity can be assessed by looking at the average differences in the share of defections between the most nationally-conformist (National/Local representatives) and least nationally-conformist (Retired/Excluded from political life) groups. In all the cases the difference between the two antipodal groups is higher than 10 percentage points. An average difference higher than 10 points can be confidently assumed as a statistically-relevant threshold to claim the presence of a sanctionary attitude performed by the domestic leadership. The only two exceptions are again represented by the British labour and liberal-democrats, which score respectively 9.3 and 9.81. This exception is justified by the absence in both cases of one of the two antipodal categories. The NPD which performs higher is by far represented by the Portuguese social-democrats (avg. diff. 21.1), followed by the French socialists (16.97), the German social-democrats (12.88), and the Spanish socialists (11.59).

Five of the twelve delegations analysed do not appear to fit the 'sanction-benefit' model and clearly do not follow the pattern identified above, namely the German Christian-democrats, the Spanish People's Party, the Portuguese socialists, and the two Italian delegations [see Figure 4].

**FIGURE 4. Absolute defection rates among the three categories**



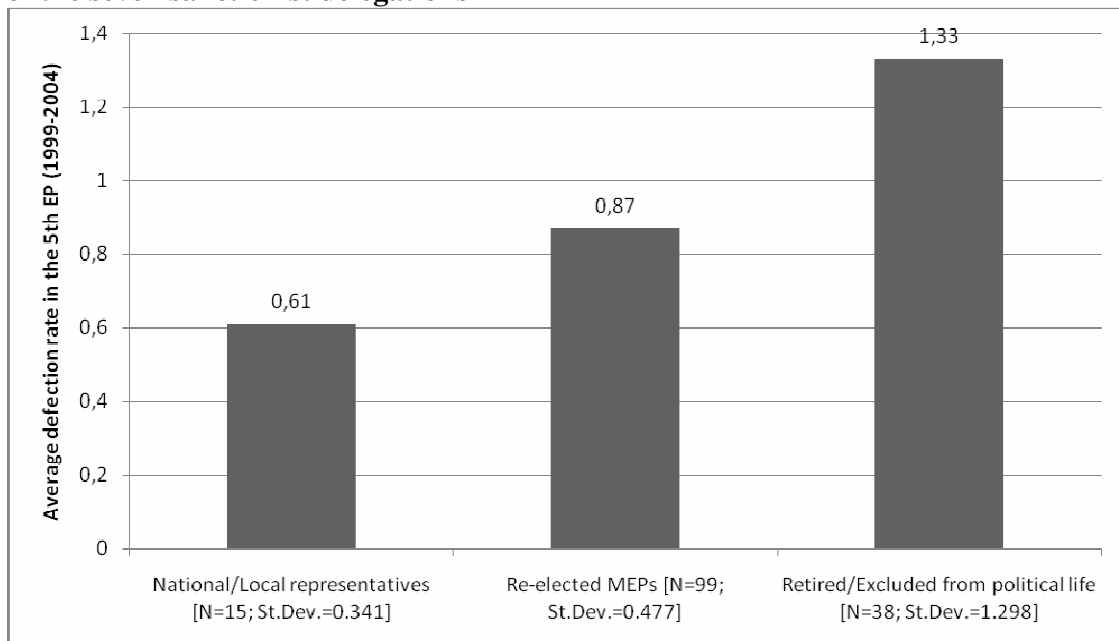
In these cases, the interpretation of the results appears far less clear and the identification of common traits or comparable behavioural patterns among the five almost impossible. Given the absence of fixed and clearly identifiable antipodal categories, the differences between the delegations do not seem to follow any clear rationale. A closer look at the national specificities will be in this respect of some help. Two delegations, the German and the Spanish ones, do not present any relevant difference in the absolute defection rate among the three sub-groups and this makes any further inference impossible. In the two cases, the average difference between the most nationally-conformist (Retired/Excluded from political life) and the least nationally-conformist (Re-elected MEPs) groups equals respectively 2.03 and 4.48 percentage points. On the other hand, in the Portuguese and in the two Italian cases, the 'National/Local representatives' emerge as the least conformist category: the absolute defection rates score respectively 26.98% (Portuguese Socialists), 32.67% (*Forza Italia*), and 22.45% (Democrats of the Left). Given the objectives of this study, what is important to mention is that the absence of a sanctionary character does not imply the existence of an inverse pattern and does not reduce the explanatory power of the results discussed above. In this respect, it is important to notice that in all the five cases the difference between the respective antipodal categories is lower than 10 percentage points.

In order to strengthen the statistical reliability of my results and inferences, a further step seems to be highly recommended which implies an overall inter-delegation comparison among the three sub-groups of MEPs. In particular, given the objectives of the study, the focus of analysis will be narrowed down by taking into account only the seven NPDs whose leaderships have been identified as belonging to the sanctionary type [see Figure 5]. This further step will contribute to confirm the existence of a pattern which goes beyond the seven individual cases analysed separately, thereby providing greater room for generalization. The 152 MEPs belonging to the seven delegations have been therefore merged into three macro-groups according to their post-2004 domestic and European career. Accordingly, 15 have been identified as 'National/Local representatives', 99 fall into the 'Re-elected MEPs' category, and 38 as 'Retired/Excluded from political life'. After a due process of relativization of the MEPs' voting records, the aggregate scores result as follows: the relative defection rate score of the 'Re-elected' MEPs (0.87) is

substantially lower than that yielded by the group of ‘Retired/Excluded’ MEPs (1.30), but higher than that composed of ‘National/Local representatives’ (0.61). The relative defection rates of the three sub-groups appear therefore consistent with my initial hypotheses, thereby confirming the existence of substantial differences in the share of non-conformist votes among the three categories of MEPs.

At aggregate level, given the larger number of MEPs included, it is also possible to look at the internal coherence of the three groups of MEPs. All the three macro-groups present a low level of internal volatility as confirmed their standard deviation values which are regularly lower than 1.5. In particular, as largely predictable, the group of domestic representatives present the highest level of internal coherence (St.Dev.=0.34), followed by the re-elected MEPs (St.Dev.=0.48), and by the excluded or retired MEPs (St.Dev.=1.30) which emerge as the least internally-coherent. A lower level of internal coherence in the third group of MEPs confirms what we assumed above, that some of the candidates favoured by the leadership of the party who failed to win a seat despite this key asset fall in this group along with troublesome MEPs.

**FIGURE 5. Relative defection rates among the three categories: aggregated values of the seven sanctionist delegations**



## **Concluding considerations**

This paper analyses MEPs' post-2004 careers by looking at their voting performance in the 5<sup>th</sup> EP. In particular, it was supposed their future chances to get a seat both at European and domestic level to be a function of their degree of national loyalty in the previous parliament. On the whole, MEPs' individual degree of 'national friendliness' proved to be a valid indicator of parties' sanctionary attitudes and the method of analysis adopted appeared particularly promising in this respect. In order to assess domestic leaderships' retrospective judgement a coherent theoretical framework was developed from the mainstream literature on the EP which was thought to provide a solid basis for my successive analytical steps. After that, a set of consistent hypothetical propositions were proposed aimed at identifying the characteristics of an ideal type sanctionary character. The test was performed through a multiple three-step experiment entailing both intra- and inter-delegation comparisons.

Most of the delegations analysed in this study, seven out of twelve, clearly fit the retrospective model proposed and can be therefore identified as 'close to the sanctionary idealtype', namely the Portuguese social-democrats, the French socialist, the German social-democrats, the Spanish socialists, and the three British delegations. More precisely in all of them the electoral fortune of the MEPs seemed to be linked to their degree of national friendliness as hypothesized in the propositions. In particular, analysis showed that the higher the MEPs' level of loyalty towards their national party delegation, the higher the likelihood of their re-election. In other words, the loyal MEPs systematically present higher chances to get re-elected due party's support, whereas those characterized by a frequent non-conformist voting behaviour in nationally-strategic votes appear on average more likely to fail. If we look at the inter-delegation comparison, the difference in the relative defection rate between the 'Retired/Excluded' and the 'Re-elected' MEPs equals 0.46. The same phenomenon can be identified at intra-delegation level. It is also true that the former MEPs sent back home as national or regional representatives present the highest level on national friendliness, that is, on average, they are those who defect less. The difference in the relative defection rate between the 'Retired/Excluded' MEPs and the 'National/Local representatives' equals 0.72.

On the other hand, five of the twelve delegations analysed do not appear to follow the ‘sanction-benefit’ model as their results are not in line with my set of hypotheses. As demonstrated in the analytical section, they do not appear to reduce the explanatory power of the model. What we can therefore conclude in this respect is that most of the delegations taken into consideration appear to perform a retrospective sanctionary reasoning when it comes to the definition of the electoral lists and the process of candidate selection, whereas five of them – for different reasons – do not. The identification of those reasons goes certainly beyond the scope of this paper. As made clear in the paper, we know that the national parties *can* control their MEPs. What the paper tried to investigate here is to what extent they do actually *do* that. The right question to ask in this context is therefore *who?* and not *why?* What we can suppose so far from this preliminary analysis is that the presence or the absence of a sanctionary character is not clearly and fully explained by macro-factors such as the national context or NPDs’ political affiliation at European level, given the impossibility to identify characteristic *styles* among the six countries and the three party families analysed. In this respect, if we shift our perspective towards the single delegations taken into consideration, it is hardly possible to identify evident national patterns which go beyond the individual cases both among the sanctionist delegations and the non-sanctionist ones; the same holds true when we look at their European affiliation.

In four of the six countries analysed the assessment of the respective delegations produces opposite outcomes in terms of domestic leaderships’ retrospective judgement. In particular, in the German, Spanish, and Portuguese cases, one delegation displays an evident sanctionary character, whereas the other does not. Only in two national contexts clearer and recurrent patterns emerge. In this sense, all the three British delegations systematically fall into the sanctionary category, whereas in the Italian case both *Forza Italia* and the Democrats of the Left do not, with the group of ‘National/Local representatives’ yielding the highest defection rate (respectively, 32.67 and 22.45). The particular pattern identified in both Italian cases may be partially explained by the open

ballot structure of the electoral system<sup>29</sup> and possibly by the endemically high level of turnover among the Italian Eurorepresentatives.

To conclude, this paper categorized twelve NPDs in the light of their MEPs' post-2004 career developments. In this sense, it aimed at providing a picture reliable enough of the domestic leaderships' behavioural styles when it comes to the candidate selection process. This attempt proved very successful, with the identification of two groups displaying different distinctive features and respectively marked by the presence or absence of sanctionary traits. As made clear above, the objective of this paper was not to answer the question of *why* this phenomenon takes place. In this respect, further research appears to be highly required and, starting from the findings presented in this paper, there seems to be considerable room for future contributions addressing this fundamental question from a wider perspective including exogenous and endogenous factors only partially incorporated by my model.

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<sup>29</sup> In October 2008 the Italian government announced its intention to amend the electoral rules used for EP elections. In particular closed-lists defined by the party will be introduced and preference voting will be abolished [[http://archivistorico.corriere.it/2008/ottobre/28/Europee\\_scontro\\_arriva\\_Aula\\_co\\_8\\_081028007.shtml](http://archivistorico.corriere.it/2008/ottobre/28/Europee_scontro_arriva_Aula_co_8_081028007.shtml)].



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